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SUBJECT: GOA SEES SOME PROGRESS IN FIGHTING SEX TRAFFICKING

REF: 06 NEW DELHI 7078

¶1. (U) Summary: In a series of recent meetings in Goa, interlocutors told Congenoff that the enactment of the Child Rights Act and the demolition of the red light district in 2005 have helped to reduce the visibility of the problem of sex trafficking in Goa. Social activists in Goa also reported that police are responsive in interceding in suspected pedophilia cases. In addition, tourism industry representatives expressed their commitment to prevent hotels from being used for sex trafficking, but acknowledged that private homes rent out space used by those determined to circumvent the law. However, NGOs noted that these efforts have forced the industry to decentralize and relocate, making it more difficult to estimate the size of the problem. Nevertheless, prosecutions of suspected sex traffickers and the rehabilitation of victims remains the biggest challenge in fighting this problem, as it is elsewhere in India. End Summary

Vacation Destination Goa

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¶2. (U) Goa is a small state of 1.35 million people, a former Portuguese colony until its annexation by India in 1961. It is famed as a popular beach destination with Westerners - especially Europeans and Russians - but in recent years, the majority of Goa's tourism dollars come from domestic travelers. Almost 2.5 million tourists per year visit Goa, of which 15 percent are foreign tourists. At 42 percent of the tourist arrivals, Britons are the largest group, followed by Russians at 8.5 percent. While officials at the Goa Chamber of Commerce say that tourism has not yet been affected by the global economic downturn, there is likely to be a slowdown in the winter high season which begins in November.

Cleaning its Image - Relocating the Problem

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¶3. (U) In the past few years, Goa has made concerted efforts to erase its image as a destination for the sex trade. While there have been some high-profile arrests of foreigners for pedophilia, there is no agreement on how severe or widespread this problem is. In 2005, the Goa police bull-dozed the major red-light district, known as Baina. Since then, police say there has been a major reduction in sex trafficking in the city, as measured by the number of police raids: according to the police, there were 34 raids in 2005, 10 in 2006, and 9 in the first half of 2008.

¶4. (U) Nevertheless, the sex industry still exists in Goa, largely catering to locals, Indian domestic tourists and those foreigners determined to seek out the illicit trade. Interlocutors told CongenOff during an October 24 visit that the sex trade has decentralized, making it harder to reach out to trafficked women to rescue them or provide health services. Nishtha Desai of Children's Rights in Goa (CRG) said the sex traffic has relocated, but doubts it has reduced substantially. The sex trade is now plied in railway and bus stations, truck depots, male beauty salons and market areas. This change mirrors the shift seen in Mumbai, even though Mumbai still has an active red-light district.

¶5. (U) According to local contacts, Goans have made concerted efforts to eradicate the sex trade from their community. Hoteliers, NGOS and Sanjeev Gadkar, Head of the Directorate of Women and Child, agreed that the 2005 Child Rights Act of Goa, which attacks both commercial sex trafficking and pedophilia, has helped to curb sex trafficking in the state. The Child Rights Act provides for penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 rupees (about \$4000) for the sexual assault of a child, and bans bringing children into a hotel unless by a blood relative. The Act makes hotels responsible for the safety of children on their premises, including adjoining beaches, with the owners and managers held personally liable. The Act also requires police to remove children from any exploitative setting and ensure their rehabilitation. Street children are required to be placed in a state shelter and provided rehabilitation. The enactment of the Child Rights Act was brought about by the joint efforts of police and child

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advocates. Gadkar noted that Community sentiment against prostitution and child sexual abuse, together with giving the police effective tools to disrupt the trade, have made a visible difference in Goa.

¶6. (U) Gadkar said he did not believe that victims of sexual exploitation were brought to Goa through violent means. He noted that most of the women in the sex trade were forced into the trade by poverty; some, he said, were tricked into leaving their homes by "boyfriends" who then got them involved in prostitution. Desai of CRG told CongenOff that children involved in the sex trade often came to Goa with their families who were economic migrants: while parents were working in hotels or farms, the children, left unattended on the beaches, became prey for pedophiles. Much of CRG's efforts involve outreach to migrant communities, canvassing beaches for children at risk of exploitation, advising parents of the risks to their children if they hang out on the beaches, and offering alternative activities for youth to keep them away from sexual predators.

Hotels Share Fight Against Sex Trafficking

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¶7. (U) Despite the Child Rights Act, and the efforts of many community activists, hoteliers acknowledge, however, that determined perpetrators continue to find other means to pursue their activities. Hoteliers in the Goa Chamber of Commerce explained to CongenOff the various means used by the hotel to dissuade guests from bringing prostitutes onto their premises, and halting the activity if discovered, but they readily acknowledge that tourists determined to find illicit sex in Goa will circumvent the law by renting space in private homes where the police do not conduct raids. Hoteliers told CongenOff that

a dictate from the state government, designed to curb terrorism, requires that every hotel guest present a photo ID at the time of check-in, and that the hotels are required to fax a copy of the registration card for any foreigner to police within 24 hours of the guests' arrival. Gadkar said that DCWD runs a media campaign through the hotels to stop prostitution. According to hoteliers, if the hotel learns that a registered guest has a visitor in the room, the front desk or security calls the room to ask that the other person be registered as well, which discourages use of the hotel premises for sexual exploitation. The hoteliers said their staffs are very concerned about child abuse and have called in the police when they suspect a guest has brought in a minor not his child. The police respond immediately by sending investigators to the hotel.

18. (U) Interlocutors also insisted that Goans are more proactive than Indians who live in other parts of the country and will call the police if they suspect a child is at risk; neighbors report suspected abuse by others in their neighborhood or suspicious behavior they note in public. Gadkar added that the exposure and identification of areas known for prostitution in the media have made it more difficult for sex traffickers to operate in Goa. However, local reporters in Goa noted to CongenOff that reporting on known traffickers or leaders of prostitution rings risks retaliation or intimidation.

#### Prosecutions Remain Difficult

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19. (U) According to CRG, the victimization of children by pedophiles is a bigger problem than sex trafficking; in both cases, prosecutions are rare. While police and the community, working together, have had some success in foiling prostitution, there has not been a concomitant success in the prosecution of cases. CRG said prosecutions often fall apart when the victim recants their story or refuse to testify. CRG claims that police are reluctant to hold tourists in custody pending investigation, as they might for an Indian suspect, for fear of creating a diplomatic incident. By the time police complete their investigation, the perpetrator has often absconded. Forensic tests often take several months for results to be returned to the police; by then the perpetrator is safely back home and the prosecution cannot move forward. Under the Child Rights Act of Goa, child sexual abuse by a tourist is a non-bailable offense. According to the hoteliers, police are

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reluctant to take actions that may impair the tourism trade for the resorts. CRG representatives suggested that the police institute a witness protection-like program for victims. They also suggested that Interpol should share information with the Indian police regarding known or suspected pedophiles and others convicted of illegal sexual predatory practices to prevent them from coming to India. (Note: India is a member of Interpol, but it is not clear how this information is shared with local police throughout India. End note.)

#### Limited Rehabilitation Capacity

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110. (U) Gadkar said that most of the women picked up in police raids are repatriated to their home towns where possible, as Goa has not had great success with shelters for such women. There is little funding for rehabilitation and while the state

provides clothing, food and security, the women have no income and often return to sex work. Some women have been able to take part in rehabilitation programs which often help women run small businesses from their homes, but those opportunities are rare. One such rehabilitation center is Swift Wash, a commercial laundry run by the NGO ARZ for women rescued from sex work. There, women from Goa - and women from outside the state who now have local families - are provided employment and a full economic and psychological support network. The state usually returns minors to their parents, but if they cannot be safely returned home, Goan officials acknowledge that there are no viable options for rehabilitating minors in shelters in the state. The minors picked up in prostitution raids or from pedophiles are sheltered temporarily at a state home for orphans, according to Gadkar.

11. (U) Comment: Goan interlocutors expressed a commitment to addressing the problems of commercial sexual exploitation and sexual victimization of children. Hoteliers and the tourism industry as a whole have become valuable partners in these efforts. Locals also cite Goa's high literacy rate and levels of education as one reason for the success of these awareness campaigns. (According to state statistics, 82 percent of Goans are literate, compared to India's national average of 61 percent literacy.) Despite these efforts, prostitution continues in Goa, albeit in less visible locales; as with Mumbai, the industry is able to adapt and relocate, making it difficult to estimate and evaluate the extent of the problem. With its small size and resources, the state has also not used its resources to develop rehabilitation centers, relying on the goodwill of local NGOs. End Comment  
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